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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2278
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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that DM Ehud Barak steadfastly expresses his determination to carry out the 10-month moratorium on settlement construction and that he will not recant his opposition to IDF

soldiers' refusal to serve. Israel Hayom and other media quoted rabbis supervising the hesder yeshivas (which combine religious studies with military service) as saying that loyalty to God comes before loyalty to the army. However Yediot reported on a group of more moderate rabbis, expressing a differing opinion. The Jerusalem Post reported that infighting among yeshiva heads may tear apart the hesder framework.

HaQaretz reported that it is possible that years ago -- until 2004 -- the problem of Iran's nuclear project could have been solved by one tough blow and with relatively minimal risk. At that time, the project was dependent on one facility: the uranium conversion plant in Isfahan. If it had been bombed, Iran would have lost large quantities of raw material for uranium enrichment and its nuclear program would have been set back years. But nothing happened and the Iranians went ahead and dispersed their facilities and materials into fortified bunkers that would be far more difficult to hit. Iran has also, in the meantime, reinforced its response capabilities to an attack. HaQaretz reported that when Benjamin Netanyahu was finance minister in Ariel Sharon's cabinet, he urged Sharon to focus on the struggle against Iran. When Netanyahu resigned over the disengagement plan and Sharon left Likud and established Kadima, Netanyahu told Sharon that if he acted against Iran before the election, Netanyahu would support him. Sharon did not act.

Israel Radio quoted FM Avigdor Lieberman as saying yesterday that Israel did all it can for Fatah, including allowing it to hold its congress in Bethlehem, but that it will make no more gestures to the Palestinians.

Yediot quoted Israeli diplomatic sources as saying that over the past couple of days Syrian President Hafez Assad conveyed to Netanyahu a message on renewing negotiations with American mediation -- proposing a withdrawal to Q67 lines in exchange for normalization, but without severing links with Iran. Israel Radio reported that Frederick Hoff, assistant to Special U.S. Envoy to Middle East Peace met yesterday in Damascus with Syrian FM Walid Muallem and discussed with him ways of renewing the peace process between Israel and Syria. This was reported by the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir. According to the report, Washington is interested in renewing the activity in this track. Meanwhile, Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed surprise at PM Benjamin Netanyahu's refusal to renew the Turkish mediation and [his preference] to give France the role of mediator between Israel and Turkey. In an interview to the Syrian media, Erdogan said that it was not important whom Netanyahu would choose as a mediator, but rather what Syria would say. He reiterated that Ankara was willing to resume its mediation between the countries, but it did not make sense for Turkey to mediate if one of the sides was not interested in this. The Turkish PM said that it did not seem likely that indirect talks between Syria and Israel would be renewed at the present stage.

Leading media quoted the London-based Arab newspaper A-Sharq Al Awsat as saying yesterday that Hamas is leaning toward accepting Israel's latest offer on a deal for the release of Gilad Shalit, although it does not include the release of major Palestinian terrorists. According to the paper, there is still disagreement within Hamas between those who support accepting the Israeli offer and those who insist on holding out for the release of all major terrorists. HaQaretz reported that Palestinian sources have told the newspaper that Hamas leadership abroad and the group's military wing in Gaza are leading opposition to the deal, while the Hamas leadership in Gaza and in the prisons support it. The report also said that the senior terrorists in question have told the Hamas leadership that if they are not released in this deal they will remain in prison for life. These include Abbas Sayad, planner of the Park Hotel Passover suicide bombing, and Issa Barghouti and Abdullah Barghouti, commanders of the Hamas military wing in the West Bank.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli officials as saying yesterday that the U.K. failed Israel on arrests, while Israel did its part in the case of filmmaker James Miller, who was allegedly killed by an IDF soldier.

The media stressed the importance of the visit of world leaders, principally President Obama, to the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, in order to rescue it. Leading media reported that

President Shimon Peres told the conference that Israel will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions growth by 20%.

Israel Radio quoted the London-based Al-Hayat as saying that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman will come to Israel tomorrow to discuss the resumption of the peace process. The radio reported that Egypt favors a total settlement freeze.

Israel Radio quoted U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry as saying that Israel has still not met its Roadmap commitments, despite the temporary construction freeze. However, he called upon the Palestinians to renew negotiations with Israel. In his monthly briefing last night at the Security Council, Serry said that the smuggling of arms and terrorists to Gaza was continuing. He warned that the situation in Gaza was continuing to deteriorate, and called upon Israel to permit the rehabilitation of areas that remained in ruins after the IDF operation.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe headlined an interview with Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat: QAmerica WonQt Tell Him Where to Demolish or Build.

HaQaretz reported that the ministerial committee on legislation is to vote Sunday on an amendment proposed by Knesset Member David Rotem (Yisrael Beiteinu) to the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Freedom, intended to bring it into line with the controversial Citizenship and Entry to Israel Law. Rotem believes the Knesset must keep the High Court of Justice from annulling a controversial law that denies citizenship to Palestinians married to Israelis. Rotem, who is chairman of the KnessetQs Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, has garnered 44 Knesset members to submit the bill with him.

HaQaretz reported that President Shimon Peres is due to meet Turkish President Abdullah Gul today at the Copenhagen summit. Media quoted DM Ehud Barak as saying yesterday that he will make an official visit to Turkey next month and meet with Turkish DM Vecdu Gonul. These are the first meetings with Turkish officials since a crisis erupted between the two countries after the Israeli offensive in Gaza nearly a year ago. Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, the Turkish envoy to Israel, met with Barak yesterday and invited him for an official visit.

Israel Radio reported that Itamar Ben Gvir, assistant to Knesset Member Michael Ben-Ari, and right wing figure Baruch Marzel, are demanding that the Bank of Israel back down from its intention to issue banknotes bearing the portrait of the late PM Yitzhak Rabin. They are quoted as saying that Rabin was a controversial figure, who was responsible for the disasters that overtook Israel, as they put it.

Electronic media reported that this morning unknown people vandalized and removed the infamous German sign QArbeit macht frei (work will set you free) from the gate of the former Auschwitz death camp in Poland. Media quoted Diaspora Affairs Minister Yuli Edelstein (Likud) as saying that the theft is a "critical failure of the Polish police." Edelstein also said that "we are in a period in which anti-Semitic acts are on the rise and there is a tangible fear for the safety of Diaspora Jews." Media quoted Yossi Levy, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman for the Hebrew press, as saying: "It's hard to imagine what kind twisted (person) would want to steal this terrible symbol at the entrance to the death camp." Polish Ambassador to Israel Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska told Israel Radio that this act is not anti-Semitic, but represents the denial of the Holocaust as a whole.

HaQaretz noted that the children of a U.S. pilot stationed in Iraq lit a Hanukkah candle in the White House yesterday.

Block Quotes:

11. QA Basis for Talks

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/18):
QNetanyahu's demand to renew the negotiations Qwithout prior

conditions,Q his refraining from officially accepting the Roadmap, and ignoring his predecessors' proposals belie his repeated calls to Abbas to show courage and return to the negotiations. Peace proposals that were officially conveyed to the other side and the American mediators, Netanyahu knows, have not really been taken off the table. Instead of wasting time on futile arguments he must show the same courage he is demanding of Abbas and continue the negotiations from the point where they were cut off last year. Israel's growing international isolation should remind Netanyahu that there is a price for foot-dragging in affairs of state and spur him to end the conflict as soon as possible and implement the two-state solution. That is his mission.

II. QStep by Step

Diplomatic correspondent and television anchor Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/18): QThe year is ending and nothing has happened -- a cul-de-sac. Remember ObamaQs vision for a quick agreement? The grandiose plan that we all reported with such enthusiasm, an agreement within a year or two: a historic speech in Cairo, followed by a map that would be imposed upon the sides -- and peace upon Israel. All this is up in smoke. There are no negotiations and no signs of negotiations. The Americans are helpless. To their credit, they have understood how arrogant and unwise they were. The question is what we do now. How do we get out of this?.... On one hand an Israeli government freezes settlements like no other one has done before; on the other hand a Palestinian leader who doesnQt want and cannot talk to it. Whichever way you look at it, you arrive at an interim solution -- something like the Mofaz plan, which is in fact the Peres plan, which actually is the Barak plan.... Even the Prime Minister is standing behind the plan -Q standing and shivering. He will never sign it or be affiliated with it but he knows that if it comes from Washington he will be there to accept it.... IsraelQs standing in the world has never been this bad.... Netanyahu sees these things and understands them. This is why a proposal for an interim agreement could work for him under certain conditions. Up till now, the Americans have vigorously opposed it.... [But] the picture has been changing in recent weeks. The Americans understand that the Palestinians will oppose anything. Since the Israelis are also opposed to a final settlement, it is better to go for the Qsmall option and bring the Palestinians there for better or for worse.... Dennis Ross is already checking [the plan].... The only condition is that it comes ... from Washington, not Jerusalem, which will make it much more difficult for the Palestinians to reject.... Netanyahu will accept an arrangement -- even a temporary one -- and get a historic spike in international public opinion.

III. QWanted: Wisdom

Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/18): QOur tragedy will be if stubborn bloody-mindedness forces a cataclysmic schism where good sense and tolerance could have prevented it. The ancient history of Jewish sovereignty in this region is a bitter saga of internal intolerance dividing and then destroying the capacity of our people to govern themselves. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the Gaza pullout, the modern lesson of disengagement is that a responsible awareness of the greater good can reconcile even viewpoints that may seem to be utterly conflicted. Where the destiny of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank, with emphasis on the settler movement] is concerned, and for the sake of Israel, there are lessons that simply must be internalized.

12. Iran:

Block Quotes:

I. QA Time to Sanction?

Washington correspondent Hilary Leila Krieger wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/18): QThis week the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed legislation limiting Iran's access to refined petroleum by a lopsided vote of 412-12. But while it might be the season to be merry, supporters of stricter sanctions against Iran shouldn't uncork the champagne bottles just yet. The House also passed sanctions legislation last Congress -- an even more comprehensive bill sponsored by the late Tom Lantos -- but the measure never made it through the Senate, let alone to the President's desk. In fact, recent years have seen many bills, some forward progress, but ultimately failure. The question is whether the new year will finally bring a new law. Of course, even if there's a change in the congressional course and sanctions are passed after years of trying, it still doesn't mean there'll be change where it's most important -- in the Iranian regime's behavior.

II. QLet's Hear Other Voices about Iran

Uri Bar-Yosef, a member of the International Relations Department at the University of Haifa, wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/18): QThe theoretical question arises -- what is preferable, a regional balance of fear or removing the nonconventional capability of all countries in the region (including Israel)? [In the public Israeli discourse] the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear facility was a story of success and salvation.... Did the Begin Doctrine prove itself? Is the best way to deal with the Iranian initiative something similar to that doctrine? What might be the ramifications of an Israeli attempt to destroy the Iranian project with regard to Iran's ability to achieve nuclear weapons and its readiness to use them when it gets them?.... [Officially] military superiority is a condition for deterring a nuclear Iran.... Theoretically the opposite is also true. Since the capability of a second strike, which foreign publications attribute to Israel, contributes to nuclear stability, and since Israel supposedly has such a capability, the Israeli interest must be that Iran also has such a capability. Therefore, no matter how absurd it sounds, the most reasonable thing Israel could do with the submarines Germany is building for it -- and which, according to foreign reports, are to serve as platforms for a second strike -- is to deliver them to Iran so that, like their counterparts already in service in Israel (as foreign sources report), they will calm Iran's fears about losing its nuclear capability after a surprise Israeli attack. This will contribute to stability. This logic, of course, is totally contrary to the accepted military logic that Israeli officers and shapers of Israeli policy are used to. That's why the subject must be opened to a public debate in which other voices can be heard.

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